Selected Effects of the Conservation Reserve Program on Program Participants: A Report to Survey Respondents

Open File Report 02-476

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Selected Effects of the Conservation Reserve Program on Program Participants: A Report to Survey Respondents[1]

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Open File Report 02-476

[1]This study was funded by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Suggested citation:

Vandever, M.W., Allen, A.W., and Sexton, N.R., 2002, Selected effects of the Conservation Reserve Program on program participants: A report to survey respondents, U.S. Geological Survey, Fort Collins Science Center, Fort Collins, CO: Open File Report 02-476, 21 p.

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Introduction

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) established under the 1985 Food Security Act was initially designed to provide the agricultural community economic assistance while protecting highly erodible cropland. Many of the environmental benefits to soil, water, and wildlife resources have been documented (Dunn and others, 1993; Ryan and others, 1998; Flather and others, 1999; Heard and others, 2000). However, the personal and social effects of the program on CRP participants (or contractees) had not been formally documented. Information had been limited to anecdotal comments from individual participants, such as: "since establishment of the CRP the streams have surface water in them" or "the CRP grasses capture drifting snow, making winter feeding of cattle easier." The Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) wanted to have a better picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the program, according to those most affected by it. In addition, policy makers wanted to get input from program participants on the growing emphasis of the program on long-term management and wildlife habitat requirements.

As a result, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) was asked to survey CRP contractees on these issues. Preliminary results from this study have been furnished to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and are being considered as new conservation and management policies for the CRP are being developed (as part of the recently passed Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002). This report includes preliminary results of the study and is being sent to survey respondents. A formal publication of survey results is also being prepared and should be completed by the winter of 2002.

The Survey

In the summer of 2001, we drew a random sample of 2,212 persons holding active CRP contracts across all USDA Farm Production Regions (Fig. 1). Because we wanted information from people intimately familiar with the program's effects on their land and communities, we did not send surveys to contracts held in the name of trusts, banks, or other non-personal ownership (49 contracts). To carry out the survey, we followed a dependable step-by-step process designed to maximize the quality and quantity of responses for mail surveys (Dillman 1978, 2000). As a result, the overall response rate for the survey was 65% (Table 1). Of the 35% who did not respond, only 1% (29 people) formally refused to participate.

The Results

We were able to summarize the survey results nationally and by USDA Farm Production Region (Fig. 1). Tables 1–15 summarize the survey's first 14 questions. Answers to the final question, an optional opportunity for individuals to comment on how the CRP can be designed or administered in the future, are summarized in an appendix.

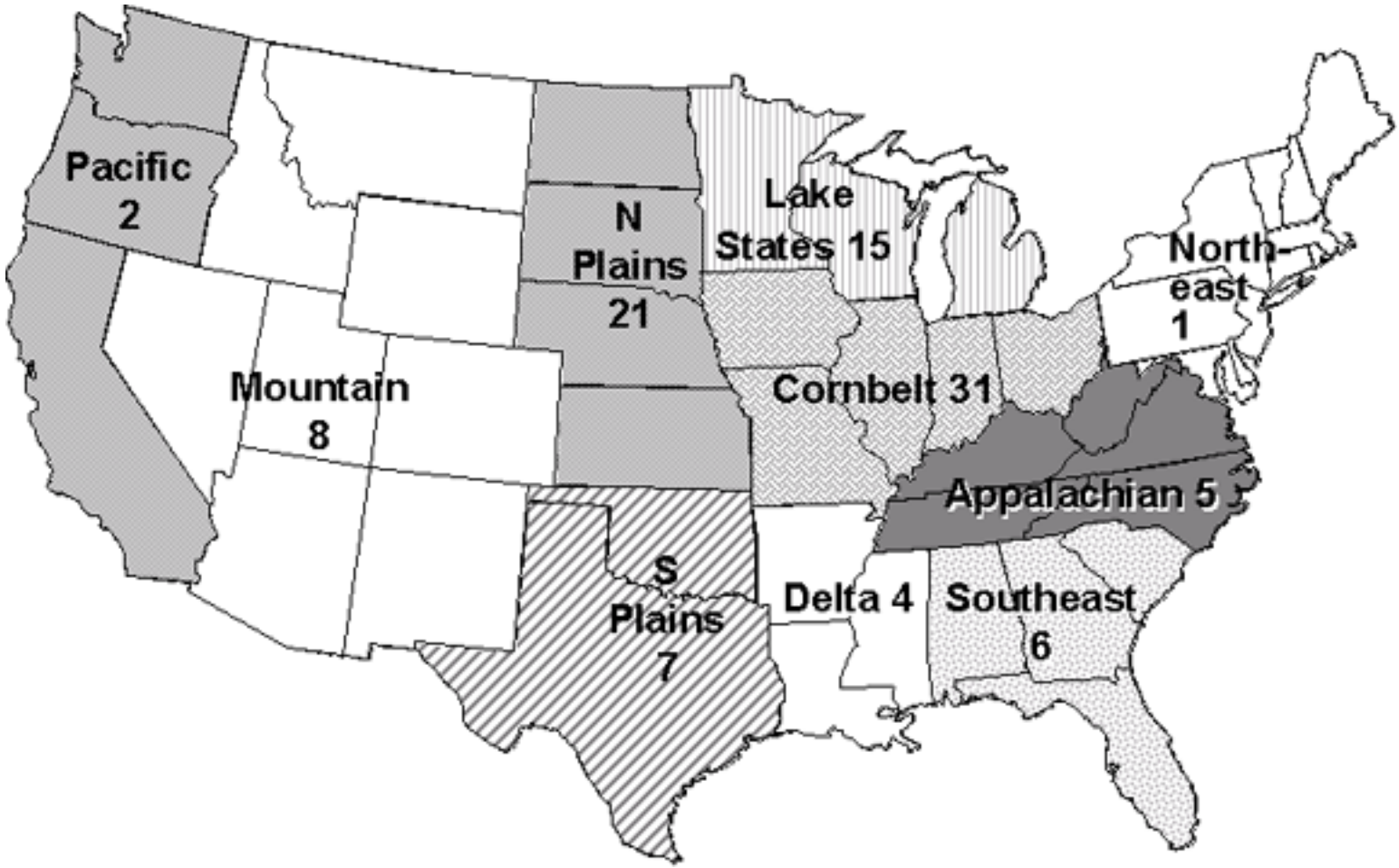

Fig. 1. U.S. Department of Agriculture farm production regions (FPR) and percentage of Conservation Reserve Program contracts within the FPRs.

Table 1. Response rates for CRP survey by region and nationally.

Survey response rates	Appalachian	Cornbelt	Delta	Lake States	Mountain	Northeast	Northern Plains	Pacific	Southeast	Southern Plains	National
Total delivered	107	669	104	299	160	102	412	105	114	140	2,212
Undeliverable	4	7	0	2	1	1	2	1	4	1	23
No response or refusal	41	217	39	75	59	39	145	41	44	48	748
Responded	59	441	64	219	100	59	259	61	62	88	1412
Response rate (%)	57.3	66.6	61.5	73.7	62.9	58.4	63.2	58.7	56.4	63.3	64.5

Characteristics of Survey Respondents and their CRP Land

From a national perspective, retired farmers embodied the largest category (52%) of survey respondents, while 43% were owners actively involved in farming (Table 2). Renters of CRP land accounted for 3.1% of respondents. Two percent of the respondents were trustees or non-farming owners (e.g., churches, airports, local governments) of CRP land. Nationally, the number of CRP acres owned by survey respondents ranged from 0.3 to 3,825 acres with an average of 156 acres (Table 3). Over half (55%) of the respondents characterized their CRP land as being dominated by native grasses, followed by non-native grasses (31%), and trees (14%; Table 4). Nearly 85% of respondents reported that the CRP covers on their land were successfully established at the first planting (Table 5). Drought was the most frequent cause of failure of initial planting of CRP covers.

Respondents' Use of CRP Lands

Nationally, only 15% of respondents stated that they had ever used their CRP lands for haying or grazing under emergency conditions (Table 6a–6d). Of those who answered yes, 64% indicated they had used these lands only one time under emergency use, 27% had used them two times, and 7% had used them three times. Only 3% of the respondents indicated that they had used CRP lands under emergency conditions more than four times in the life of their contract.

When asked what types of management, use, or disturbance had taken place on their CRP acres, control of weeds was the most common answer (Table 7). Nearly twice as many respondents reported mowing as a means of weed control (62%) as compared to spot treatment of weeds using herbicides (35%). Twelve percent of respondents reported that, to their knowledge, no known management/disturbance had occurred on their CRP lands.

Table 2. Which of the following best describes your relationship to the CRP (% of respondents)?

Relationship	Appalachian	Cornbelt	Delta	Lake States	Mountain	Northeast	Northern Plains	Pacific	Southeast	Southern Plains	National
Owner but not active	66.7	49.0	62.9	63.1	41.2	62.7	43.2	34.4	66.1	55.8	52.0
Owner/ operator	31.6	45.6	35.5	34.6	52.6	32.2	50.6	54.1	27.4	40.7	43.0
Renter/ operator	0.0	3.2	0.0	1.4	4.1	5.1	4.6	8.2	1.6	1.2	3.1
Trustee	1.8	0.5	1.6	0.5	2.1	0.0	0.8	0.0	1.6	2.3	0.9
Other	0.0	1.8	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.8	3.3	3.2	0.0	1.1

Table 3. How many acres do you have enrolled in the CRP?

Average number	Appalachian	Cornbelt	Delta	Lake States	Mountain	Northeast	Northern Plains	Pacific	Southeast	Southern Plains	National
Acres	67.2	58.5	120.5	54.4	561.9	37.3	177.8	626.3	87.9	276.9	156.0

Table 4. How would you describe the vegetation on your CRP acres (% of respondents)?

Vegetation cover	Appalachian	Cornbelt	Delta	Lake States	Mountain	Northeast	Northern Plains	Pacific	Southeast	Southern Plains	National
Mostly native grasses	48.3	56.0	31.7	61.1	46.9	71.2	65.9	44.1	20.0	54.9	55.1
Mostly non-native grasses	29.3	37.4	0.0	22.7	51.0	13.6	29.5	52.5	6.7	45.1	31.3
Mostly trees	22.4	6.6	68.3	16.1	2.1	15.3	4.7	3.4	73.3	0.0	13.6

Table 5. Did any vegetative covers fail or need to be re-established when your land was first enrolled in the CRP? If so, what was the cause (% of respondents)?

Results	Appalachian	Cornbelt	Delta	Lake States	Mountain	Northeast	Northern Plains	Pacific	Southeast	Southern Plains	National
Successful at first planting	85.7	82.5	81.3	88.0	80.6	82.5	87.5	81.4	88.3	83.8	84.5
Failed due to drought	8.9	8.4	15.6	2.9	15.3	14.0	7.8	10.2	8.4	16.2	9.1
Failed due to insect/weeds	3.6	3.4	0.0	1.9	2.0	3.5	1.6	5.1	0.0	0.0	2.3
Failed due to flooding	1.8	3.6	0.0	2.9	0.0	0.0	2.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.1
Failed/other reasons	0.0	2.1	3.1	4.3	2.0	0.0	0.8	3.4	3.3	0.0	2.0

Table 6a. Have you hayed or grazed your CRP lands under emergency provisions (% of respondents)?

Answer	Appalachian	Cornbelt	Delta	Lake States	Mountain	Northeast	Northern Plains	Pacific	Southeast	Southern Plains	National
No	87.9	88.4	95.3	89.8	64.6	96.6	76.2	89.8	93.4	79.0	85.0
Yes	12.1	11.6	4.7	10.2	35.4	3.4	23.8	10.2	6.6	21.0	15.0

Table 6b. If yes to 6a, what percentage of acres were hayed or grazed?

% hayed or grazed	Appalachian	Cornbelt	Delta	Lake States	Mountain	Northeast	Northern Plains	Pacific	Southeast	Southern Plains	National
0–20	42.9	31.3	100.0	15.8	24.2	0.0	19.3	33.3	75.0	6.3	24.4
21–45	14.3	22.9	0.0	15.8	15.2	50.0	29.8	66.7	25.0	37.5	25.4
46–60	14.3	20.8	0.0	36.8	36.4	50.0	28.1	0.0	0.0	18.8	25.9
61–100	28.6	25.0	0.0	31.6	24.2	0.0	22.8	0.0	0.0	37.5	24.4

Table 6c. If yes to 6a, how many times have these acres been hayed or grazed?

Number of times	Appalachian	Cornbelt	Delta	Lake States	Mountain	Northeast	Northern Plains	Pacific	Southeast	Southern Plains	National
1	71.4	72.3	100.0	75.0	62.5	100.0	52.6	66.7	33.3	60.0	63.7
2	28.6	19.1	0.0	25.0	31.3	0.0	33.3	33.3	33.3	20.0	26.8
3	0.0	8.5	0.0	0.0	6.3	0.0	7.0	0.0	33.3	13.3	6.8
4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.8	0.0	0.0	6.7	1.1
5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.1
6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5

Table 6d. If yes to 6a, how many times has your land been eligible for emergency use (numbers in %)?

Number of times	Appalachian	Cornbelt	Delta	Lake States	Mountain	Northeast	Northern Plains	Pacific	Southeast	Southern Plains	National
0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6
1	60.0	44.2	100.0	70.6	20.0	100.0	30.0	66.7	50.0	30.8	39.8
2	20.0	32.6	0.0	23.5	50.0	0.0	30.0	33.3	25.0	15.4	31.6
3	0.0	20.9	0.0	5.9	20.0	0.0	16.0	0.0	25.0	23.1	16.4
4	20.0	2.3	0.0	0.0	3.3	0.0	12.0	0.0	0.0	23.1	7.0
5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.3	0.0	4.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.8
6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.0	0.0	0.0	7.7	2.3
7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6

Table 7. To the best of your knowledge, what types of management, use, or disturbance has taken place on all, or part, of your CRP acres? (Totals are percents and may not total 100% because more than one answer may have been chosen.)

Answer	Appalachian	Cornbelt	Delta	Lake States	Mountain	Northeast	Northern Plains	Pacific	Southeast	Southern Plains	National
Spot treatment of weeds by mowing	70.7	76.7	34.4	69.6	32.3	57.6	61.1	39.0	39.3	57.3	62.2
Spot treatment of weeds by herbicides	8.6	32.0	7.8	30.9	42.4	8.5	53.7	83.1	19.7	24.4	34.7
Additional seeding	8.6	21.4	7.8	10.6	22.2	11.9	12.8	32.2	8.2	19.5	16.4
Burning, intentional	3.4	13.9	6.2	6.0	5.1	1.7	24.5	22.0	14.8	11.0	12.9
None, there has been no known disturbance or use of the CRP acres	24.1	1.8	34.4	18.9	21.2	40.7	0.4	11.9	24.6	19.5	12.1
Haying authorized under emergency use	6.9	8.6	1.6	8.8	22.2	1.7	20.2	3.4	4.9	6.1	10.5
Establishment of firebreaks by mowing or plowing	3.4	5.5	32.8	5.1	5.1	5.1	7.8	20.3	45.9	9.8	9.6
Fertilization	6.9	10.7	9.4	3.7	3.0	3.4	3.1	1.7	6.6	7.3	6.4
Flooding	1.7	8.9	4.7	5.5	1.0	3.4	7.0	0.0	1.6	1.2	5.6
Grazing authorized under emergency use	5.2	3.0	0.0	1.8	21.2	0.0	5.8	8.5	3.3	12.2	5.2
Thinning of volunteer pine, hardwood trees or shrubs	3.4	4.1	3.1	3.2	0.0	1.7	6.2	3.4	3.3	1.2	3.7
Burning, accidental	1.7	2.7	3.1	1.4	1.0	1.7	3.5	10.2	3.3	9.8	3.2
Thinning of pine, hardwood trees or shrubs planted as part of the program	1.7	1.1	18.7	2.3	0.0	1.7	0.8	0.0	24.6	0.0	2.9
Grazing, accidental	0.0	1.4	3.1	0.5	3.0	0.0	2.7	8.5	3.3	2.4	2.0
Use of pesticides for insect control	0.0	0.2	0.0	1.8	2.0	0.0	1.9	1.7	1.6	0.0	1.0

Environmental/Social Effects of the CRP

Respondents voiced both positive and negative aspects of the CRP to their farm or community. When asked about specific benefits of the CRP, enhanced control of soil erosion (85%) was identified as the greatest benefit (Table 8). The importance that CRP participants placed on wildlife was characterized by 73% reporting increased populations of wildlife associated with enrolled lands. Although respondents reported that the CRP provided more opportunities to hunt (38%) and increased prospects to lease land for hunting (12%), nearly 60% of the respondents thought opportunities to observe wildlife was an important benefit of the program.

Improvements in water (39%) and air quality (29%) were also acknowledged as environmental benefits. Over 30% of survey respondents noted improved control of drifting snow as well as greater permanence of surface waters (24%) because of the CRP. Improvement in the scenic quality of agricultural landscapes was cited as a CRP benefit by 37% of the respondents. Nearly 17% of the respondents saw the CRP as contributing to their future income.

Not all perceptions concerning environmental and social effects of the CRP were positive (Table 9). Nationally, 29% of respondents viewed CRP lands as a source of weeds. Similarly, 13% of respondents perceived the CRP as making their farm, or landscape, appear untidy or poorly managed. The CRP was viewed as a potential fire hazard by 19% of those responding to the survey. In relation to wildlife, 9% indicated that the CRP had caused problems due to unwanted wildlife on their land. In addition, 18% of respondents attributed an increase in unwelcome requests for permission to hunt to the presence of the CRP.

CRP Emphasis on Wildlife

Nationally, 73% of respondents felt that wildlife receives an appropriate level of consideration in the CRP (Table 10). Sixteen percent advocated more attention be given to wildlife while 11% felt that wildlife receives too much consideration.

When asked about the amount of assistance participants receive to maintain or improve wildlife habitat, most (82%) believed it is about right (Table 11). About 16% thought that not enough assistance was furnished. Only 2% of respondents believed that USDA furnishes too much assistance relative to wildlife.

With CRP enrollment, specific types of cover practices are encouraged to maintain or improve wildlife habitat. Almost 55% of the survey respondents felt that they had been well informed about the reasons why particular practices were encouraged (Table 12). In contrast, 38% felt that they had been partially informed and 7% believed they had not been informed at all.

In some situations, to qualify for re-enrollment in the CRP, USDA requires that vegetation in part of the field be destroyed and replanted to other species to increase the value of the field for wildlife. When asked about these requirements, 75% of the survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that CRP benefits to wildlife were important (Table 13a). Nearly 62% either agreed or strongly agreed that requirements to enhance vegetation composition to maintain long-term quality of wildlife habitat were reasonable (Table 13b). In contrast, 16% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this sentiment. Of those who answered this question, 22% expressed no opinion. However, 82% agreed that if CRP covers are well established, there should be no requirements to modify them (Table 13c). Only 4% disagreed or strongly disagreed, believing it reasonable to disturb established vegetative covers to furnish improvements in wildlife habitat quality. Fourteen percent had no opinion about these requirements.

Table 8. What are the benefits of the CRP acres on your farm or community, observed by you or your family? Totals are percents and may not total 100% because more than one answer may have been chosen (% of respondents).

Answer	Appalachian	Cornbelt	Delta	Lake States	Mountain	Northeast	Northern Plains	Pacific	Southeast	Southern Plains	National
Improved control of soil erosion	88.1	89.3	79.4	76.6	87.9	74.1	84.9	93.4	85.2	90.7	85.4
Positive changes in wildlife populations	69.5	72.7	75.8	75.2	69.7	62.1	77.1	82.0	68.9	67.4	73.2
Increased opportunities to observe wildlife	61.0	58.6	67.7	72.0	50.5	60.3	55.8	62.3	57.4	45.3	59.4
Improved water quality	45.8	48.2	23.8	36.2	28.3	27.6	38.0	45.9	37.7	22.1	38.8
Increased opportunities to personally hunt	32.2	37	61.9	40.8	22.2	41.4	42.8	27.9	37.7	24.4	37.6
Improved scenic quality of farm or landscape	45.8	37.3	42.9	40.8	33.3	29.3	35.3	37.7	45.9	30.2	37.4
Improved control of drifting snow	11.9	22.3	0.0	34.9	56.6	8.6	51.2	41.0	0.0	33.7	30.5
Improved air quality	32.2	21.6	30.2	21.1	40.4	15.5	31.4	54.1	45.9	45.3	29.2
Increased permanence of surface water	23.7	27.3	20.6	19.7	21.2	27.6	19.8	36.1	18.0	25.6	23.7
Potential increase in future income (e.g., sale of timber)	33.9	9.8	65.1	15.6	8.1	13.8	8.9	8.2	73.8	9.3	16.7
Increased opportunities to lease land for hunting	13.6	6.6	23.8	8.7	9.1	10.3	19.4	9.8	19.7	15.1	11.9
No positive effects	1.7	0.9	1.6	1.4	2.0	3.4	0.0	0.0	1.6	1.2	1.1

Table 9. What are the negative effects of the CRP to your farm or community, observed by you or other members of your family? Totals are percents and may not total 100% because more than one answer may have been chosen (% of respondents).

Answer	Appalachian	Cornbelt	Delta	Lake States	Mountain	Northeast	Northern Plains	Pacific	Southeast	Southern Plains	National
Source of weeds	26.3	33.6	14.1	32.2	23.7	21.1	29.7	34.5	13.6	22.8	28.8
Potential fire hazard	10.5	8.9	17.2	19.6	46.4	1.8	24.7	44.8	15.3	30.4	19.3
Attracts unwanted requests for permission to hunt	15.8	23.3	14.1	12.6	12.4	7.0	20.5	20.7	13.6	16.5	18.0
Makes farm appear unkempt or poorly managed	22.8	14.2	18.7	18.7	9.3	14.0	6.2	12.1	8.5	11.4	13.1
Attracts unwanted wildlife	7.0	11.0	4.7	7.9	8.2	5.3	7.7	10.3	3.4	11.4	8.7
Negative effects on local economy	3.5	3.9	4.7	3.7	23.7	3.4	11.2	20.7	1.7	16.5	7.8
Too much cropland taken out of production	3.5	3.4	7.8	3.3	8.2	5.3	3.1	3.4	5.1	5.1	4.1
No negative effects	47.4	13.3	54.7	40.7	24.7	52.6	7.7	25.9	39.0	40.5	25.4

Table 10. Please give your evaluation of the amount of attention given to wildlife habitat in CRP enrollment requirements (% of respondents).

Amount of attention	Appalachian	Cornbelt	Delta	Lake States	Mountain	Northeast	Northern Plains	Pacific	Southeast	Southern Plains	National
Appropriate	76.8	71.9	76.6	75.6	68.0	86.2	71.9	73.8	75.4	68.2	73.2
Not enough	12.5	19.4	17.2	19.8	3.1	12.1	14.1	4.9	16.4	15.3	15.6
Too much	10.7	8.7	6.3	4.6	28.9	1.7	14.1	21.3	8.2	16.5	11.1

Table 11. Was the amount of assistance you got from the Farm Service Agency/Natural Resources Conservation Service to plan, maintain or improve CRP acres for wildlife habitat… (% of respondents)?

Amount of assistance	Appalachian	Cornbelt	Delta	Lake States	Mountain	Northeast	Northern Plains	Pacific	Southeast	Southern Plains	National
Appropriate	80.7	83.5	81.3	87.2	81.4	81.0	78.5	85.0	78.7	77.6	82.2
Not enough	17.5	15.3	18.7	11.9	12.4	19.0	18.0	11.7	19.7	18.8	15.7
Too much	1.8	1.1	0.0	0.9	6.2	0.0	3.5	3.3	1.6	3.5	2.1

Table 12. How well have you been informed by the Farm Service Agency/Natural Resources Conservation Service during enrollment or contract renewal about why specific types of cover practices are encouraged (% of respondents)?

How well informed	Appalachian	Cornbelt	Delta	Lake States	Mountain	Northeast	Northern Plains	Pacific	Southeast	Southern Plains	National
Well informed	57.9	54.3	53.2	46.9	59.8	52.5	57.0	61.7	51.7	62.8	54.8
Somewhat informed	35.1	38.2	35.5	46.0	38.1	39.0	34.0	31.7	40.0	33.7	37.9
Not at all informed	7.0	7.5	11.3	7.1	2.1	8.5	9.0	6.7	8.3	3.5	7.3

Table 13a. In some situations, to qualify for re-enrollment in the CRP, USDA requires that part of the field have clover/alfalfa interseeded into existing grasses or that native grasses be planted to replace existing grasses. This is most often done to increase the fields' value as wildlife habitat. Which of the following answers best describe your feelings about these requirements?

CRP benefits to wildlife are important (% of respondents)

Answer	Appalachian	Cornbelt	Delta	Lake States	Mountain	Northeast	Northern Plains	Pacific	Southeast	Southern Plains	National
Strongly agree	42.9	34.8	36.1	40.0	12.5	31.0	28.9	23.0	27.1	25.3	31.8
Agree	26.8	42.3	41.0	45.6	51.0	51.7	42.2	42.6	55.9	39.8	43.6
Neutral	21.4	15.6	13.1	9.3	18.8	12.1	18.0	21.3	15.3	14.5	15.4
Disagree	7.1	4.8	8.2	4.2	11.5	5.2	7.8	8.2	0.0	10.8	6.3

Strongly disagree	1.8	2.5	1.6	0.9	6.3	0.0	3.1	4.9	1.7	9.6	3.0

Table 13b. USDA requirements to enhance CRP covers to maintain long-term benefits to wildlife are reasonable (% of respondents).

Answer	Appalachian	Cornbelt	Delta	Lake States	Mountain	Northeast	Northern Plains	Pacific	Southeast	Southern Plains	National
Strongly agree	27.8	17.7	18.3	19.7	5.3	17.2	11.8	8.2	8.5	12.2	15.3
Agree	33.3	47.0	60.0	54.5	45.3	50.0	40.6	29.5	62.7	40.2	46.5
Neutral	25.9	20.0	13.3	16.4	28.4	24.1	28.7	26.2	20.3	20.7	22.1
Disagree	9.3	12.4	6.7	7.5	13.7	6.9	13.0	24.6	6.8	14.6	11.7
Strongly disagree	3.7	2.8	1.7	1.9	7.4	1.7	5.9	11.5	1.7	12.2	4.4

Table 13c. If CRP covers are well established, there should be no requirements to disturb or enhance them to renew acres in the program (% of respondents).

Answer	Appalachian	Cornbelt	Delta	Lake States	Mountain	Northeast	Northern Plains	Pacific	Southeast	Southern Plains	National
Strongly agree	40.0	44.5	37.3	39.8	46.9	33.3	50.8	60.7	29.3	59.0	45.1
Agree	36.4	36.2	44.1	42.7	36.5	40.4	32.0	34.4	44.8	28.9	36.8
Neutral	12.7	16.1	8.5	13.3	13.5	19.3	12.5	3.3	19.0	9.6	13.6
Disagree	10.9	2.5	6.8	3.8	2.1	5.3	3.5	1.6	5.2	0.0	3.4
Strongly disagree	0.0	0.7	3.4	0.5	1.0	1.8	1.2	0.0	1.7	2.4	1.0

Management Alternatives

Over half (58%) of respondents thought that mowing would be the most suitable method for managing CRP lands (if periodic management was needed [Table 14a]). Shredding of vegetation was favored by 36%. Roughly one quarter (26%) thought application of herbicides, prescribed burning (25%), and grazing (21%) were effective methods for management. Disking or plowing of CRP ground was the least desirable management practice with only 8% of respondents selecting this option.

Thirty-four percent stated that periodic management of CRP acres is not desirable, primarily because they oppose disturbing CRP grasslands (Table 14b). Over 14% stated that they did not have the equipment to implement management. A small number of respondents (4%) simply did not want to manage their CRP land.

Table 14a. If periodic management of CRP grassland acres were encouraged to maintain desirable characteristics of vegetation, which method(s) would be most suitable to your operation? Check all that apply. (Totals are percents and may not total 100% because more than one answer may have been chosen.)

Answer	Appalachian	Cornbelt	Delta	Lake States	Mountain	Northeast	Northern Plains	Pacific	Southeast	Southern Plains	National
Mowing	49.1	68.6	33.9	75.0	34.0	76.3	57.6	31.1	33.3	31.0	57.7
Shredding/brushhoging	63.2	42.0	57.6	37.3	16.5	49.2	15.7	21.3	43.9	38.1	35.4
Herbicides	7.0	26.9	15.3	23.1	21.6	5.1	35.7	49.2	10.5	25	25.5
Burning	5.3	25.1	18.6	18.9	18.6	8.5	39.6	41.0	26.3	15.5	24.7
Grazing	12.3	9.8	10.2	9.4	62.9	8.5	29.4	42.6	22.8	38.1	20.9
Disking/plowing	7.0	6.2	15.3	9.4	5.2	0.0	9.8	13.1	17.5	8.3	8.3

Table 14b. Periodic management of CRP acres is not desirable, because, (% of respondents).

Answer	Appalachian	Cornbelt	Delta	Lake States	Mountain	Northeast	Northern Plains	Pacific	Southeast	Southern Plains	National
I oppose disturbance of CRP grassland fields	28.1	33.6	21.7	31.6	34.7	20.3	40.2	41.0	15.8	51.2	34.0
I do not have equipment	21.1	10.5	20.0	18.4	18.4	13.6	14.1	9.8	22.8	11.9	14.5
I do not desire to manage field	7.0	1.6	5.0	7.5	5.1	5.1	4.7	1.6	10.5	1.2	4.2

The final question related to management asked participants to choose the most acceptable scenario for managing CRP lands. Nationally, nearly half (49%) of respondents indicated that they wanted to see no changes in CRP management criteria (Table 15). In this scenario, CRP lands could only be hayed or grazed under emergency conditions with a reduction in rental payment for the acres used. The second most popular alternative (32%) offered increased management practices to maintain the long-term quality of wildlife habitat with an increase in CRP rental payments to cover related expenses. A less popular scenario was one involving limited haying or grazing, preferred by 12% of respondents. Under this scenario CRP land could be used for limited haying or grazing without reduction in rental payments. Emergency use of the used portion of the field would be prohibited for 2 years. Periodic haying or grazing with a 25% reduction in rental payments for the acres used was preferred by only 7% of the respondents.

Table 15. In relation to periodic management of CRP land, which of these choices are most appealing to you? (% of respondents)

Choices	Appalachian	Cornbelt	Delta	Lake States	Mountain	Northeast	Northern Plains	Pacific	Southeast	Southern Plains	National
No change	43.6	52.5	54.5	53.5	39.8	52.7	43.1	50.0	41.5	51.9	49.1
Increased management practices w/increased payments	34.5	32.9	34.5	38.1	23.5	34.5	27.7	26.7	45.3	26.6	32.1
Limited haying/ grazing w/same payments	20.0	8.8	7.3	6.9	19.4	7.3	14.2	18.3	13.2	13.9	11.5
Periodic haying/ grazing w/reduced payments	1.8	5.8	3.6	1.5	17.3	5.5	15.0	5.0	0.0	7.6	7.3

Appendix

Comments on the CRP Design and Administration

The final question on the survey was an optional opportunity for respondents to tell us how the CRP might better meet their needs. Over 41% of respondents provided comments. The majority of these remarks was short and could be characterized as sweeping expressions of satisfaction with the CRP and a strong desire to see the program continued without substantial change. Although the focus of the survey was on wildlife and related management, respondents described a wide range of environmental and social benefits resulting from the program. One participant's remark reflects a feeling expressed by many who furnished written observations:

> "While the CRP is a benefit to wildlife, its most important function is to keep land idled in useable condition in this disastrous farm economy. The program serves an important national security purpose as an investment against an uncertain future."

Across several regions, however, issues of obvious concern included greater financial assistance to cover management costs, distress about destruction of existing cover to meet re-enrollment requirements, desires to implement periodic use of grasslands, and a need for more technical assistance and education related to wildlife habitat management. Following are comments received by region, which we have summarized.

Pacific Region

Thirty-three respondents (54%) provided written comments. These comments generally expressed positive perceptions of the CRP, with many requesting expansion or suggesting that the program remain essentially unchanged. However, some changes were recommended, including:

- longer contract periods,
- more liberal enrollment criteria that would permit additional land into the program, and
- greater weight given to local identification of vegetation and management practices that more properly fit regional conditions.

Respondents cited the following management practices as a way to maintain habitat quality and control of weeds and brush:

- periodic grazing,
- limited grazing rather than herbicides in sensitive (e.g., riparian) areas,
- more liberal use of burning and disking, and
- additional financial assistance to control weeds.

Respondents expressed some concern related to vegetation interseeding and replacement requirements. Requirements to interseed legumes for vegetation enhancement were perceived as ineffective where subsequent chemical control of broadleaf weeds was required. Similarly, there was a perception that original CRP grasslands provided the same or better wildlife habitat than did the grass covers that replaced them. Respondents believed that reestablishment of grasses was difficult, expensive, and encouraged establishment of weeds. Many felt that enhancement of vegetation species composition in CRP grasslands should be required only on acres newly enrolled in the program, or where the initial success of seeding was poor. They also felt that well-established grasslands should not be altered solely to meet wildlife objectives.

Mountain Region

Over half (58%) of respondents provided comments on the CRP. Many cited positive effects, including: conservation of ground water, increased wildlife, and control of wind erosion.

However, a common opinion expressed was that wildlife had received too much attention in recent CRP enrollment criteria. As was the case in the Pacific Region, destruction of well-established grasslands to replant other grass species was perceived as an unnecessary waste of resources. Several respondents stated that the CRP was an effective conservation program but the increased emphasis on wildlife should come with an increase in funds to cover the requirements to improve vegetation conditions. Likewise, several respondents thought rental payments should be increased to help defray rising costs associated with taxes and inflation. Many Mountain Region respondents favored limited haying or grazing to maintain the long-term quality of CRP grasslands. However, others felt that hay production on CRP grasslands could have a negative economic effect on non-CRP forage producers. They suggested that there be closer monitoring and control of hay produced under emergency use and no economic profit from this production be permitted. A few respondents stated that enrollment of entire farms in the CRP should be prohibited since they believed it limited farming opportunities and had a negative impact on local economies. Finally, respondents encouraged a greater consistency in evaluating lands submitted for CRP enrollment and more emphasis on establishment of trees and windbreaks.

Northern Plains Region

Forty-four percent of respondents provided comments. A large number of those comments focused on positive effects, including: benefits to wildlife populations, improvement in scenic quality of landscapes, soil enrichment, decreased herbicide use, and economic benefits to local economies.

Many advocated periodic, limited haying, grazing, or burning to maintain the quality of the stands and as a means to control wildfire hazards. However, costs and risks associated with burning of CRP grasslands were of concern. Several respondents suggested that haying may be a more appropriate management option and that haying of firebreaks should be permitted without reduction in rental payments. Several respondents cited the benefits of having CRP grasslands as a source of hay during emergency conditions.

The most frequent concern expressed in the Northern Plains was a need for increased financial assistance for grassland management. While management costs (e.g., fuel, weed control) have increased, USDA payments to cover these requirements have not. There was also a related desire for an increase in CRP rental rates associated with a cost-of-living index.

Respondents from this region expressed more dissatisfaction with USDA CRP-related assistance than any other region. Several respondents described difficulties working with USDA staff in counties other than where they lived. Also noted was the problem that generalized USDA guidelines do not fit the needs of every farm. Several respondents stated that they felt "forgotten" after the initial sign-up. Some suggestions for improvement included:

- more local control in defining management options,
- on-going, relatively frequent assistance and information related to land management,
- more information on proper plant species, planting requirements, vegetation management options/techniques, and long-term maintenance of wildlife habitat,
- clearly defined program entry requirements and constraints that are not changed in the middle of the contract period,
- consistent enforcement of CRP management violations, and

- consistent evaluation of lands submitted for enrollment.

Other recommendations for general CRP improvement included:

- longer contracts,
- whole farm sign-ups,
- higher rental payments for irrigated land, and
- inclusion of existing grasslands into the program.

In addition, several respondents suggested that management requirements and constraints should be defined at the beginning of the enrollment period and not changed prior to expiration of the original contract.

Southern Plains Region

Respondents from the Southern Plains Region (37%) described many benefits of the CRP, including: benefits to wildlife, air quality, and groundwater; improved scenic quality of the landscape; and financial stability provided to CRP participants and local economies.

Respondents provided some recommendations for improved program administration, including reduction in the amount of paperwork and record-keeping required; more lands enrolled in the CRP; the ability of counties that have not met their 25% enrollment cap to transfer eligibility of unused acres to counties where farmers have been unable to get into the program; and an increase in rental payments (to benefit local economies, to furnish better maintenance of lands enrolled in the program, and to keep poor, erosive fields from returning to production).

Suggestions for program improvements related to habitat included an emphasis on habitat improvements associated with playa lakes; periodic review of vegetation conditions on enrolled lands with recommendations for long-term management; more information on management practices; increase in USDA landowner education focused on habitat and wildlife management; and more uniform control of weeds.

Periodic grazing to allow for more natural control of weeds and invasive woody species was suggested. It was also suggested that limited grazing be permitted without financial penalty if it is done in accordance with an approved conservation plan.

Reduction of soil erosion was described as an important benefit of the program. Respondents also believed that the present emphasis on management of program lands for wildlife is excessive. Several respondents characterized requirements to enhance 51% of existing CRP grasslands through replanting to native grasses as an impractical and wasteful constraint to remain in the program. The requirement to plow up well-established grasslands to replant other grasses was characterized as “illogical nonsense” and an overall contribution to increased erosion of soil and loss of existing wildlife benefits.

Provisions requiring control of weeds by shredding/mowing or herbicides and planting of legumes to furnish sufficient cover for wildlife seemed conflicting to several landowners.

Lake States Region

Written observations (47% of respondents provided comments) were primarily positive, including benefits to wildlife and water quality, and high-quality administrative and technical assistance furnished by the USDA.

Several respondents believed that wildlife should be the greatest priority in enrollment objectives, followed by water quality and soil erosion.

Although USDA assistance was applauded, some recommendations were made, including:

- greater USDA flexibility that encourages programs more specifically tied to regional conservation problems,
- better education and technical assistance programs that address long-term management of CRP lands for wildlife, and
- improved distribution of USDA study results to participants describing best CRP management practices and associated environmental and wildlife benefits.

Recommendations for program improvement included longer advance notice of sign-up periods; more flexible enrollment periods (e.g., 5, 15, 20 years); and elimination of the 25% cap per county.

In addition, there was a desire to give re-enrollment priority to existing contracts where high-quality CRP vegetation has already been established. Several respondents stated that in the long-term, this would save taxpayer money and maximize environmental benefits. Similarly, some believed that resident landowners and operators should be given priority over investors and absentee landowners in program enrollment. Specific suggested improvements related to habitat on CRP land included:

- a greater emphasis on hardwood tree plantings,
- mandatory use of firebreaks,
- acceptance of more and different types of land (e.g., woodlots) into the program,
- limited haying or grazing (two or three times in a 10-year contract) to maintain grassland quality, and
- greater attention to the use of prescribed burning

The most common concern from this region focused on relations between inflation, increasing land taxation rates, and the inability of rental payments to cover mounting requirements for management of CRP covers. Maintenance payments have not increased, making management difficult and limiting program enrollment. Financial incentives were believed necessary to enable landowners to implement conservation and wildlife practices. Requirements to destroy a portion of existing grasslands or interseed legumes to qualify for reenrollment were also a concern in this region. However, these concerns were not nearly as strong as those voiced in the Southern Plains, Northern Plains, and Mountain Regions.

Cornbelt Region

Comments were wide-ranging, with 26% of respondents providing comments. Most comments could be described as "pleased with the program as is." The CRP was characterized as benefiting farmers as well as non-farmers by returning dividends to future generations far in excess of taxpayer costs. Some specific positive feedback on the program included benefits to: local economies, commodity prices, sportsmen, water quality, air quality, and wildlife habitat.

Wildlife benefits were an important topic in this region with many respondents wanting more emphasis on native vegetation, wildlife conservation, and habitat. However, some respondents resented the increased importance given to wildlife habitat in recent enrollment requirements. They believed that the emphasis of the CRP should remain on soil conservation with wildlife assigned a lower priority. Some thought habitat enhancement requirements and unusual, expensive seed requirements have made the program more troublesome and costly. Because they conflict with control of broad-leaved weeds, requirements to interseed

legumes to enhance wildlife habitat should be discontinued. Destruction of existing cover and reseeding of new grasses was perceived as being expensive, exposing land to erosion, and causing an overall loss in wildlife habitat.

Respondents did provide some suggestions for improving the program, including:

- expansion of the waterways buffer program,
- allowing existing contracts with established cover to be automatically eligible for renewal,
- allowing greater flexibility in enrollment periods,
- encouraging more marginal, non-tilled land without a cropping history into the program to increase environmental benefits, and
- incorporating better conservation practices into lands in production (for example, establishment of grassed strips between rowcrop fields to provide cover for wildlife and allowing enrollment of brushy fencerows into the CRP to prevent their removal).

While a few respondents were opposed to any disturbance of CRP covers, more respondents favored periodic use of grasslands. Many favored periodic haying and grazing to reduce dead plant material and maintain the quality of grasslands. Periodic haying/grazing was also perceived to be a way to control weeds and lower dependence on herbicides for weed control. In addition, some requested more flexibility in methods to control weeds (e.g., disking, haying).

Several respondents were highly satisfied with the quality of USDA assistance. However, some described concerns that local NRCS/FSA staff was over-burdened by an excessive workload. Respondents felt that a pamphlet describing the program was a poor substitute for personal attention. Specifically, respondents said they desire:

- more information on management of various types of plantings;
- more information on management of program lands for wildlife;
- periodic visits to farms by USDA staff for consultation and improved management assistance;
- workshops and other ways to get information out to new participants in farm programs prior to, during, and after enrollment;
- program options that are easier to understand and specific to local problems; and
- consistent rules and regulations across counties.

As in most of the other regions, CRP land rental rates and expenses associated with management and maintenance of program lands were issues of concern. Most respondents favored an increase in rental payments to closely reflect current land values and maintenance costs.

Delta Region

Comments (47% provided comments) were generally positive. They cited their appreciation for an increased awareness of wildlife and effective administration of the CRP by the Farm Service Agency.

Suggested improvements to the program included:

- the need for more education on managing CRP trees,
- increased emphasis on planting of hardwood tree species,

- more educational and information seminars related to conservation and land management,
- simpler paperwork associated with the program; an increase in rental payments to cover increasing taxes,
- more enrollment periods,
- broadened definitions for eligibility of additional property into the program,
- the use of traditional crop production methods to produce wildlife food plots, and
- more emphasis on individual farmers and local problems (rather than trying to make one national program fit local situations).

Southeast Region

Written comments (40%) were positive, reflecting their appreciation for the environmental, financial, and wildlife benefits derived from the program.

Several respondents expressed ideas for program improvement, including: allowing non-cropland to be eligible for CRP enrollment; more diverse types and amount of land dedicated to wildlife food plots; more local control of identifying acceptable conservation practices; and more information on long-term management of CRP lands.

In addition, some thought that more cost-share funds were needed to convert existing stands of fescue to native grasses. Along those lines, several respondents stated that in order to meet wildlife and environmental requirements associated with CRP lands, adjustments of rental rates or cost-share funds were needed.

Appalachian Region

Nearly 46% of respondents provided comments on the CRP program. Most comments reflected positive opinions about the CRP in this region, including: benefits of program payments, improvements in water quality, and increased abundance of wildlife associated with program lands.

Potential CRP improvements that were cited included:

- expanding the program to include lands already in grass,
- elimination of fescue as a planting option,
- more frequent sign-up periods,
- more lands eligible for continuous sign-up programs,
- greater emphasis on planting hardwood trees,
- greater flexibility in management options,
- periodic haying or grazing of CRP grasslands to maintain habitat quality, and
- an increase in cost-share funds to assist in long-term management.

A greater emphasis on education concerning managing program lands for wildlife was seen as an issue needing more attention. Information from farmers/operators who have had success in managing CRP lands (for wildlife and other environmental concerns) to those newly enrolled in the program was identified as an information need.

Northeast Region

Forty-two percent of respondents commented specifically on the CRP program. Overall, participants were satisfied with the administration and assistance provided by the USDA and recognized the benefits of the program to wildlife.

The greatest concerns expressed by participants in this region were relations between rising costs associated with management of lands enrolled in the program, increased levels of taxation, and the decline in rental payments. Specifically expressed was the need for cost-share funds to establish legumes, especially for those who do not have the proper equipment to implement the recommended management objectives.

Summary

The CRP is an evolving program. When it was created in 1985 no one could foresee the widespread effects of setting aside an enormous acreage of farmed land for conservation purposes. Policy makers can make decisions on estimates of tons of topsoil lost or millions of dollars spent, but do they place a value on improved control of drifting snow or increased opportunities to observe wildlife? Although it is nearly impossible to assign a dollar value to such benefits, they are important. It is apparent that opinions concerning environmental and social effects of the CRP vary across regions and between participants. What is important to one landowner may be meaningless to their neighbor. Regardless, this is the first CRP survey of its kind and every participant's views are valuable and appreciated.

Your opinions and ideas are important and are making a difference. The USDA has found information contained in this survey useful and will take it into consideration in refinement of CRP management policies. Thank you for taking the time to be an active participant in our survey.

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